

Japanese National Festivals

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Abstract: The article discusses some of Japan's national holidays. Information about when and how the holidays will be held is shown. There is also extensive material about the Japanese people.

This article is very useful for those interested in Japan and young students

Keywords: about Japan and lifestyle, Japanese national festivals.

Japan's population is over 126m, 75% of whom live in urban areas like Tokyo, Yokohama, Kawasaki, Osaka and Nagoya. With such densely populated cities, space is precious and land prices extremely high. Japan's population has been aging since 2011, with some of the world's oldest people living in the Okinawan Islands. Most city workers have office jobs and are known as salary men or OL (office ladies). Management is hierarchical and the work ethic strict, with overtime assumed. In fact, leaving on time suggests a lack of commitment or loyalty. Nevertheless, people enjoy a high standard of living. Transport to and from work is by train.

Matsuri, festivals in Japan, are often spectacular, filled with color, exuberance, and tradition. Japan has perhaps more unique festivals than any other country in the world, and taking in a *matsuri* is an unforgettable experience. If you want to see Japan at its liveliest, a high-energy *matsuri* is the place to do it! The celebrations themselves vary widely depending on the occasion, but almost always involve spirited processions of participants vigorously chanting, dancing, and bearing massive, intricately-decorated *mikoshi* or floats. As if all of this weren't enough, festivals in Japan are also one of the best places to sample an incredible array of unique, casual, and seasonal Japanese foods. To the surprise of many, street food is not very prevalent in Japan (unlike in many other parts of Asia). But at *matsuri* you'll find the streets lined with after colorful, offering a remarkable selection of healthy festival snacks.

The Best Japanese Festivals: Our Favorite Matsuri Japan has too many fantastic matsuri to include in one list, and some of the most delightful are unsung festivals held in small neighborhoods throughout Japan. In our guide to Japan's festivals below, we provide an introduction to what we consider some of the best and most interesting Japanese festivals, including:

Kyoto's Gion Matsuri, Osaka's Tenjin Matsuri, Aomori's Nebuta Matsuri, The Awa Odori festival in Tokushima

And many more!

A selection of Tokyo's best festivals.

Kanda Matsuri (Kanda Myojin Shrine, Tokyo). Kanda was a key central district of Edo (and remains so in present-day Tokyo), and Kanda Matsuri is known as one of Tokyo's big three festivals. It takes place only in odd-numbered years (alternating with the Sanno Matsuri) and technically lasts an entire week, although the main parade occurs on the Saturday closest to May

15th. This shinto festival began as a celebration of Tokugawa Ieyasu's victory at the battle of Sekigahara, and continued as a show of wealth for the new Edo period shogunate. Over time, the festival has come to represent prosperity for the residents, and it's quite a spectacle to observe as the parade of portable shrines, musicians, priests on horseback, and dancers make their way through the streets, blessing local onlookers. The procession ends at Kanda Myojin Shrine.

Sanja Matsuri (Asakusa Shrine, Tokyo). Sanja Matsuri is another boisterous shinto festival, held on the third Sunday of May (and preceding Friday and Saturday) in Tokyo's old-fashioned Asakusa district. The Sanja Matsuri – which draws around 2 million visitors over three days, and is considered the largest shinto festival in Tokyo – honors the three founders of Senso-ji Temple, who are enshrined in the Asakusa Shrine next door to the temple. There are plenty of games and food to be enjoyed, and the festival itself is known for being relatively raucous. The streets are flooded with flute players, taiko drummers, and people chanting. On Sunday, at the height of the festival, three mikoshi — each with the spirit (kami) of one of the founders — are energetically carried through the streets before being laid back in their place of rest at Asakusa Shrine. It is said that the louder the chanting and music, and the more roughly the mikoshi are shaken, the more good luck will be bestowed upon the neighborhoods they pass.

Gion Matsuri (Yasaka Shrine, Kyoto). Gion Matsuri is perhaps Japan's best-known festival, and possibly the largest as well. It has a long history (dating back to the year 869) and lasts the entire month of July, culminating in a parade of floats — the Yamaboko Junko — on July 17th. Although there are festival-related events throughout the month, the main festivities occur on the day of the Yamaboko Junko (July 17th) and on the three evenings before (known as the yoiyama evenings).

“Yamaboko” refers to the two types of floats: the smaller yama floats and the massive hoko floats. Hoko floats can be up to several stories (around 25 meters) in height, and can weigh as much as 12 tons carrying festival participants. The festival floats are elaborately decorated with gorgeous tapestries and paper lanterns, and hoko floats require around 40 people to pull them through the streets.

During the yoiyama evenings, streets are closed and packed with people enjoying food stalls performances, traditional music and costumes, and possibly even spotting geiko and maiko. This is a chance to enjoy the impressive festival floats up close, and a special opportunity to see Kyoto residents let loose!

Another fascinating aspect of the yoiyama evenings is the concurrently-held Byobu Matsuri (“Folding Screen Festival”), during which many Kyoto families open the entryways of their homes to the public, offering a glimpse of precious family heirlooms. There is also a slightly smaller parade (with fewer floats) that takes place on July 24th, and it too is preceded by its own yoiyama nights of revelry.

Nebuta Matsuri (Aomori Prefecture). Nebuta Matsuri, held in the northern prefecture of Aomori, is one of Japan's most visually striking festivals. During the Nebuta Matsuri, the streets of Aomori City come alive with breathtakingly vibrant lantern floats, which can take up to a year to build.

The magnificent floats — depicting imposing gods, warriors, kabuki actors, animals, and even TV celebrities — are made with washi (Japanese paper) and lit from the inside. Accompanying the floats are groups of dancers, taiko drummers, flutists, and other musicians.

Hanabi (Fireworks) Matsuri. If you're braving the heat and visiting Japan in summer, you may have the chance to attend one of the country's dazzling hanabi (fireworks) matsuri. As anyone who has spent much time in Japan knows, fireworks are elevated to an art here, and hanabi artisans take their jobs seriously!

Throughout the summer hanabi festivals take place all over the country, and range from major events in cities like Tokyo and Osaka to regional and local displays in smaller communities. Like

other matsuri, these festive celebrations are a great opportunity to relax, spend time with friends and family, and indulge in cold drinks and festival food.

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